

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**A FAILED COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY:  
THE BRITISH SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN - 1780-1781  
ARE THERE LESSONS FOR TODAY?**

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## ABSTRACT

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The Southern Campaign (1780-1781) was the application of the British grand strategy to conduct a counterinsurgency operation aimed at pacifying the Southern Colonies. The campaign was based on the flawed assumption that the Southern colonies contained a large loyalist population, and thus could be easily brought under British control. However, the plan was so poorly planned that the British operations inflamed the population and pushed them towards the rebels rather than pacifying them.

An analysis of the strategy and subsequent application of the plan is of contemporary interest, especially when analyzed using current doctrinal concepts. The British Southern campaign is an ideal case study on the fatal ramifications of failing to apply the principles of MOOTW as contained in JP 3-07, and has surprising parallels to what the US is currently experiencing in Iraq.



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## **A FAILED COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY: THE BRITISH SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN - 1780-1781 ARE THERE LESSONS FOR TODAY?**

There is but one grand domestic evil from which all other evils, foreign and domestic, have sprung: The influence of the Crown. To the influence of the Crown we must attribute the loss of the army in Virginia. To the influence of the Crown we must attribute the loss of the thirteen provinces of America; for it was the influence of the Crown in the two Houses of Parliament that enabled His Majesty's ministers to persevere against the voice of reason, the voice of truth, the voice of the people.<sup>1</sup>

- Charles James Fox before the House of Commons 1782

The British surrender at Yorktown on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1781 marked the end of the British strategy to pacify the southern colonies, which became known as the Southern Campaign, and marked the beginning of the end of British rule in the colonies. Conducted during the Revolutionary War from 1780-1781, it was a result of a dramatic shift in strategy that occurred after the British loss at Saratoga. The campaign was based on an incorrect assumption that the Southern colonies contained a large population of loyalists, and therefore could be quickly pacified. The loyalists could then be trained, and subsequently employed to control the South, freeing British forces to conduct operations elsewhere. The assumption of Loyalist support in the south did not accurately reflect the attitudes in the region, where British legitimacy was already on the wane. As a result of the tenuous legitimacy of British cause, they needed to execute a textbook pacification program. The poorly designed and executed plan, however, actually inflamed the populous and pushed them toward the rebel cause, further undermining the legitimacy of the operation.<sup>2</sup>

A study of this 220-year old campaign is extremely relevant. The United States, arguably the sole superpower in the world, is currently involved in a physical and ideological struggle in Iraq. Although the conventional phase of the war was quickly and overwhelmingly won by the United States and its coalition partners, the conflict has changed and entered a much more dangerous phase, that of an insurgency. Despite this change, there is very little consensus on how to successfully achieve victory against such a nebulous enemy. As a result, the military should look at past campaigns in order to find techniques, tactics, and procedures to guide it in the successful prosecution of the counter-insurgency. The United States' struggle for independence against Britain provides an excellent historical example of how a maritime nation, which had just ended a long global war with a rival superpower and was looking for a "peace dividend", became embroiled in a conventional conflict at the limits of their power projection

capability. The British failure to recognize the insurgent nature of the conflict and correctly fight it has multiple similarities to the situation in Iraq today.

This paper will begin with an analysis of the strategic situation that the British faced in 1783, followed by the major events in the Southern Campaign. Next, a brief review of classic insurgency theory and current Joint Doctrine for conducting counterinsurgency operations as contained in Joint Pub 3-07 will be conducted. Using this framework as a basis, the British design for, and conduct of, the Southern Campaign will be analyzed utilizing the six principles of MOOTW as contained in Joint Pub 3-07 (objective, unity of effort, security, legitimacy, restraint, and perseverance). The analysis will show that the British Southern Campaign was flawed from the very start, and exacerbated by poor execution that actually aided the insurgency rather than combating it. Finally, a rough comparison will be made between the British Southern Campaign and the current campaign in Iraq. The comparison will show that this case study is clearly of contemporary interest because it demonstrates the fatal ramifications of failing to apply the six principles when designing and executing a military operation other than war.

### **SUMMARY OF THE BRITISH "SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN"**

Before conducting an analysis of the British strategy for pacifying the Southern Colonies, it is important to first briefly review the major events of the campaign and the strategic situation leading up to it. The war the British were fighting in the colonies began in 1776 and had been primarily conducted in the northern colonies in a more or less conventional struggle. The British repeatedly attempted to destroy General Washington's conventional force, which they believed would quickly end the conflict. However, they were unable to do so, and in late 1777 they suffered a tremendous defeat at the Battle of Saratoga, where General Burgoyne's British army was surrendered after losing over 4,000 soldiers (only 4,991 of over 9,000 men were standing on the field of surrender at Saratoga). The defeat caused the British leadership to reevaluate its strategy for ending the rebellion, and developed the strategy known as the "Southern Campaign", the goal of which was to pacify the southern colonies and then expand the pacification efforts northward.

The campaign began when a British force of over 8,500 men commanded by General Clinton, the British General in charge of military operations in the American Colonies, landed near Charleston, South Carolina in May 1780 and forced the surrender of the only significant rebel force in the theater. With his new base of operations secure, General Clinton quickly established a series of outposts throughout South Carolina designed to establish control over the region. In June, Clinton returned to his main command post in New York City and passed

responsibility for the campaign to General Cornwallis. Cornwallis inherited a situation that was quickly deteriorating, as fighting among loyalists and rebel supporters erupted into an unrestrained, often brutal civil war. The lack of restraint by British and Loyalist forces turned the populous against Cornwallis, nullifying British efforts to pacify the region.<sup>3</sup>

Cornwallis's destruction of Gate's larger American army at the Battle of Camden shifted the campaign into a new phase. Cornwallis, convinced that Georgia and South Carolina were secure, made the assessment that gaining control North Carolina was the key to ensuring the continued security of the pacified areas. However, as he attacked north in three columns, his forces became increasingly isolated and vulnerable to attack. His westernmost column was destroyed at the Battle of King's Mountain on October 7, 1780, and his center column was destroyed at the Battle of Cowpens three months later.

After these defeats, Cornwallis focused on destroying the American force led by General Greene, and pursued him inland, further from the coast and his critical supplies. As this operation was occurring, partisan forces reduced the outposts in South Carolina and Georgia left vulnerable by Cornwallis's departure. The pacified areas were reverting to Rebel control.<sup>4</sup>

After the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, Cornwallis had to withdraw his exhausted force back to Yorktown, a seaport from where he could either receive reinforcements and supplies, or be extracted. Before relief could arrive from New York, a combined French and American force led by General Washington isolated Cornwallis and forced his surrender.<sup>5</sup>

#### **WHAT IS AN INSURGENCY?**

Before an analysis of the counter-insurgency plan that the British attempted to execute in the Southern Colonies can be conducted, it is crucial to first define what an insurgency is, and to then review current doctrine on how to conduct counter-insurgency operations. This will provide the framework within which a critical analysis of the British counter insurgency plan.

An insurgency is defined as a "protracted politico-military struggle with political power as the central issue."<sup>6</sup> Insurgencies are often very difficult to defeat for a variety of reasons. First, insurgents usually recognize the futility of attempting to engage their opponent conventionally, especially in the early stages of the insurgency, since their opponent is almost always better equipped.

Mao Tse Tung's seminal work, "On Guerilla Warfare" offers some insight on how and why insurgencies are fought. He states emphatically "in a war of revolutionary character, guerilla operations are a necessary part. This is particularly true in a war waged for the emancipation of

a people who inhabit a vast nation.”<sup>7</sup> The reason that they are a necessary part of a war for emancipation is very simple,

It is a weapon that a nation inferior in arms and military equipment may employ against a more powerful aggressor nation. When the invader pierces deep into the heart of the weaker country and occupies her territory in a cruel and oppressive manner, there is no doubt that conditions of terrain, climate, and society in general offer obstacles to his progress and may be used to advantage by those who oppose him. In guerilla warfare, we turn these advantages to the purpose of resisting and defeating the enemy.<sup>8</sup>

Mao states that guerilla operations must be fought in coordination with regular forces, and even that insurgent forces are but one step in the evolutionary ladder towards becoming “orthodox forces.” This is because it is unlikely that insurgent forces alone could win a revolutionary conflict; it must be supported by conventional forces (which transitioned from guerilla forces) acting in close coordination. Mao identifies seven distinct phases in a revolutionary struggle: arousing and organizing the people, achieving internal unification politically, establishing bases, equipping forces, recovering national strength, destroying the enemy’s national strength, and regaining lost territories.<sup>9</sup>

Since an insurgency almost always operates from a position of physical weakness, its success rest solely on the support of the populace. This is because the population is a source of manpower for the insurgency, logistics support, intelligence, and provides a safe haven from the enemy. That is why popular support is critical for the insurgent cause, since without it the insurgency has no haven from the enemy and is ultimately vulnerable. In the words of Mao, the people are “likened to be water, and the [insurgents] the fish that inhabit it. How may it be said that the two cannot exist together. It is only the undisciplined troops who make the people their enemies, and who, like the fish out of its native element, cannot live.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the key to defeating an insurgency rests in a successful removal of the political or social grievances of the insurgents, and isolating them from the population.

#### **CURRENT COUNTER INSURGENCY (COIN) AND MOOTW (JP 3-07) DOCTRINE**

Since insurgents are not likely to engage in force on force battles unless the conditions clearly favor them, an insurgency is usually typified by a protracted campaign in which there is very rarely a clear indication that the counter-insurgency forces are winning. Historically, there have been two distinct schools of thought on how to fight an insurgency: the direct approach of seeking out and annihilating the enemy’s forces, and the indirect approach of removing the political reasons for the insurgency, thus undermining it.<sup>11</sup> While the direct approach has its

usefulness, the indirect approach, historically, has been the most successful, in ensuring long-term success.

Under current doctrine, insurgencies and counter-insurgency operations are considered Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). Joint Publication 3-07 provides the United States military forces “basic concepts and principles to the Services and combatant commands to prepare for and conduct military operations other than war.”<sup>12</sup> Current Joint doctrine recognizes the significant difference between war, where the goal is to win quickly by conducting “large-scale sustained combat operations to achieve national interests,”<sup>13</sup> and MOOTW, where the goal is to “deter war, resolve conflict, promote peace, and support civil authorities.”<sup>14</sup> There is recognition that MOOTW operations are much more closely tied to political considerations than high intensity conflicts. In fact, where there is often a single goal in war – defeat of the enemy, there might be multiple, layered goals in a MOOTW environment. In recognition of the complex, dynamic environment that MOOTW operations pose, the Joint Publication lays out six overarching principles, which adjust some of the enduring principals of war to fit the unique MOOTW environment. These principles serve a framework to guide leadership in the development of comprehensive plans to defeat adversaries operating in the MOOTW spectrum of operations, including counter-insurgency operations. The six principals are objective, unity of effort, security, restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy. The specific meaning and application of these principals will be discussed in detail in the subsequent sections of this paper. However, in addition to providing a commander with a framework within which to develop MOOTW plans, the six principles provide an excellent framework within which to conduct a historical analysis. In fact, when used to analyze the British Southern Campaign, the principles of MOOTW provide a unique and contemporary framework to explain why the British Southern strategy was doomed to fail.

## **OBJECTIVE**

Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.<sup>15</sup>

The main British objective in the Southern Campaign was to pacify the colonies by “Americanizing” the war, which would enable the British pacify the colonies at minimal cost to the Crown. This strategy was based on the fundamentally flawed assumption of a large loyalist support base in the southern colonies, thus they would pacify one colony at a time in the south and then move northward until all the colonies were back under British control. The merit of a strategy to pacify an area, train and equip Loyalist units, and then pass responsibility for control



of the area to the Loyalist units is clear. If successful, the strategy might have enabled the British to achieve the operational endstate - pacification/control of the south - with a minimal number of regular forces, thus conserving other military forces for employment against the French. As stated earlier, however, a key component of counter-insurgency operations is to identify, and then alleviate the social or political grievances that the insurgents are using as a rallying theme.

The insurgents, or Colonial rebels, had several issues and themes that resonated throughout the colonies and served as an effective means of recruiting men and garnering support for their cause. The most important was the concept of internal self-rule. A common theme throughout the progression from discontent to open rebellion (1763-1776) was the colonies emphasizing their right to control the affairs within their own colonies, specifically the raising of taxes. The multiple, bumbling attempts of Parliament to reassert its authority over the colonies in an attempt to pay for the Seven Years War with France created a rallying theme for the colonists.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, the colonial infrastructure that was created to collectively address the grievances the colonists had with Parliament with the revenue raising acts would eventually become the leadership mechanism for the rebellion. The effects that these acts had on the colonies could be seen immediately. The Virginia legislature approved seven resolves after the passing of the Stamp Act, the fifth stating

the General Assembly of this colony have the only and sole exclusive right and power to lay Taxes and Impositions upon Inhabitants of the Colony and that every Attempt to vest such Power in and Person or Persons whatsoever other than the General Assembly aforesaid has a manifest Tendency to destroy British as well as American Freedom.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, the sixth and seventh resolves included language that stated Virginians were not bound to any law other than those created by the Virginian legislature. Anyone who maintained differently was an enemy of the colony.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, if had the British repealed the acts and allowed the colonies to levy taxes themselves, a critical element of the rebellion would have been removed, making military operations much more feasible and successful. The British leaders, however, were unwilling to relinquish what they believed was their sovereign right over the colonies, and therefore through their policies continued to inflame the anti-British feelings. Since the broad base of Loyalist support did not exist in the south, a principle failure in the British conduct of the Southern Strategy was their inability to translate the objective of Americanization of the war into coherent operational and tactical plans designed to win the "hearts and minds" of the populous from which they were attempting to gain support.<sup>19</sup>

Clinton and Cornwallis had a difficult time reconciling the directions from London to crush the rebellion by conducting coastal raids, operations designed to induce terror, and aggressive military campaigning, while at the same time attempting to convince a hostile populous of British benevolence.<sup>20</sup> To make the situation worse, Lord Germain, Secretary of State, continued to "shift priorities, almost from one month's letter to the next, even from one paragraph to the next."<sup>21</sup>

Adding to the friction of the situation was the fact that the British had no experience in conducting peace keeping/peace enforcement operations, and therefore they did not establish any special rules of conduct for their regular or Loyalist forces. A unique aspect of the operation was that the Loyalist units often used their new positions and power to settle old feuds against their neighbors, often in brutal fashion, which essentially ignited the countryside into a civil war.

As a result of the ad-hoc nature of the plan, the British established no measures of effectiveness to gauge the progress of the pacification, which would have facilitated a systematic, methodical approach to the process. Instead, they relied on the instincts and opinions of "regular leaders [who] revealed themselves as unduly optimistic in deciding that any particular area had been pacified."<sup>22</sup> An excellent example of the failure of the British to establish a coherent plan to win the "hearts and minds" was Clinton's proclamation that offered full citizenship and pardons to all citizens of the south who would take a "loyalty oath", and condemned those who did not as rebels. This had an extremely negative effect on the population: it drove the paroled rebel prisoners who were neutral back into active rebellion and infuriated the Loyalists who had endured many hardships for the Crown.<sup>23</sup>

## **LEGITIMACY**

In MOOTW, legitimacy is a condition based on the perception by a specific audience of the legality, morality, or rightness of a set of actions.... If an operation is perceived as legitimate, there is a strong impulse to support the action. If an operation is not perceived as legitimate, the actions may not be supported and may be actively resisted. In MOOTW, legitimacy is frequently a decisive element.<sup>24</sup>

Legitimacy of the authority and efforts of the "friendly forces", specifically from the viewpoint of populous of the region in which operations are conducted, is the single-most important of any successful counterinsurgency campaign. If the operations are not viewed as legitimate, then the populous does not provide more than cursory support to the operations, which in turn enables the insurgents to operate, and in most cases, recruit more insurgents from the disaffected populous.

The legitimacy of British rule in the Colonies was the foundation of the entire conflict, and the failure of the British to accurately assess the colonial sentiments towards the crown ultimately resulted in the execution of the flawed Southern Strategy. Throughout the entire Revolutionary war, the British continued to believe that the Carolinas, Georgia, and the Chesapeake colonies were "hotbeds of Loyalism, ready to support royal authority whenever it appeared with sufficient force."<sup>25</sup> The assumption of widespread loyalist support to the crown failed to take into account the changes that colonial life, or more specifically, the frontier experience had effected on the American colonists. The hardship of life in colonial America, the struggles against the native Americans and French during the French and Indian War, and years of a British "hands off" policy towards the colonies, particularly in the matter of defense, had a very dramatic effect. The lack of overt British government presence in the colonies had enabled the establishment of an autonomous political and economic infrastructure in the colonies. The colonists, although nominally viewing themselves as British subjects, had developed a very independent, egalitarian, uniquely American mindset due to the distance of the British leadership. Additionally, due to their distance from the authority of the Crown, American colonists had begun to rely solely on their local, elected governing bodies to enforce laws and "give order to their lives."<sup>26</sup> The period has been aptly described as "an anarchy of local autonomy."<sup>27</sup> One of the sole unifying aspects of colonial America was an economic dependency among the colonies. Therefore, as the British attempted to restore the aristocratic long-distance rule to the colonies, and specifically economic authority in the form of taxes, it was only natural that the Americans would resist.

It could be argued that if the British Southern Strategy had been conducted 4 to 5 years too late. If it had been used in the early stages of the Revolutionary War it might have succeeded. By 1780, however, the British had missed their window of opportunity to successfully execute the strategy. A consensus estimate by scholars on the level of loyalist support is difficult to find. It is generally thought, however, that in the beginning of the war, one-third of the population was Loyalist, one-third uncommitted, and one-third rebel. By 1780, when the Southern Campaign began it is estimated that only 25% of the population was Loyalist.<sup>28</sup> Largely due to inaccurate intelligence from loyalists who testified before parliament, the British continued to overestimate the Loyalist population within the colonies, specifically the south. During the four years after the war began, the lack of overt British presence in the south had facilitated a "conversion process", where many of the previously apathetic citizenry had been pressured to support the rebel cause.<sup>29</sup> A societal change had begun to occur where equality had begun to replace the old hierarchical order. This meant that the general populous was very

reluctant to support converting back to the British style hierarchical society.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the British failure to destroy George Washington's conventional army in the north, and word of General Gate's stunning victory at the Battle of Saratoga in the fall of 1777 had begun to create an image of British vulnerability in the minds of the colonists, and had created rebel "heroes" around which the uncommitted had begun to rally. By 1780, the British would have had to conduct a flawless operation designed to win the hearts and minds of a general populous, in order to convince Southern citizens that the British were the legitimate authority.

## **PERSEVERANCE**

Prepare for the measured, protracted application of military capability in support of strategic aims. Some MOOTW may require years to achieve the desired results. Often, the patient, resolute, and persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives, for as long as necessary to achieve them, is a requirement for success.<sup>31</sup>

The British prosecution of the southern strategy clearly shows that they did not have the requisite patience to endure a long, protracted pacification program. At the operational and tactical level, Cornwallis became quickly frustrated by the situation in the South, particularly with colonists who would receive training and weapons from the British and then desert to join the rebels. His frustration culminated with an order to hang every Loyalist who had deserted, imprison all persons that did not support the cause, and use their confiscated property to compensate Loyalist losses.<sup>32</sup> Cornwallis's premature decision to attempt to gain control of North Carolina before he completed pacification of South Carolina further demonstrates the British military's impatience with pacification operations. Cornwallis, like most commanders, yearned for a conventional fight, and became focused on gaining contact with, and defeating a conventional rebel force rather than continuing to consolidate his gains in South Carolina, which would have forced the Rebels to come to him.

At the national level, even though King George remained steadfastly committed to bringing the colonies back under British rule, the British defeat at Saratoga in 1777 and the subsequent French entry into the war had many within the British government (including Lord Germain, the British Secretary of State), and many of the British allies advocating an end to the war in the colonies in order to bring the full weight of British national power to bear against France.<sup>33</sup> MajGen Wilhelm Lossberg, a German commander in the colonies, perhaps best summed up the consensus of the commanders in the field when he stated:

We are far from an anticipated peace, because the bitterness of the rebels is too widespread, and in regions where we are masters the rebellious spirit is still in

them. The land is too large, and there are too many people. The more land we win, the weaker our army gets in the field. It would be best, to come to an agreement with them.<sup>34</sup>

The leadership within the rebellion must have been more than aware of the war-weariness that was growing within England, and more than likely derived strength from the knowledge that victory seemed inevitable. Eventually, the strain of the war with France, and the growing frustration in Parliament and England with the war, which culminated with the British surrender at Yorktown, resulted in a change in government which was committed to ending the war.

#### **UNITY OF EFFORT**

...emphasizes the need for ensuring all means are directed to a common purpose. However, in MOOTW, achieving unity of effort is often complicated by a variety of international, foreign and domestic military and non-military participants, the lack of definitive command arrangements among them, and varying views of the objective.<sup>35</sup>

Due to the intense nature of fighting a counterinsurgency, at the strategic level, if a nation is going to successfully prosecute a counter-insurgency, it must commit completely across all aspects of its military power. During the revolutionary War, the British found it impossible to do this. The ongoing cold/hot war with France essentially relegated the war in the colonies to a sideshow from the British viewpoint. The Seven Years War, which was a truly global war fought between the British and the French, officially ended with a peace treaty signed on February 10, 1763 and cemented British victory and their place as a global superpower. Due to an enormous national debt,<sup>36</sup> however, the British parliament immediately started to look for a "peace dividend", which included a proposal to reduce the strength of the British Army from 120,000-30,000.<sup>37</sup> In fact, by the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the British Army numbered a mere 48,647 men, of which 8,000 were stationed in the colonies.<sup>38</sup> The remaining forces were positioned to protect Britain from the threat of invasion by France. Table 1 shows the disposition of the British army as of 1775.

Location	Number of Personnel
England	15,547
Scotland	474
Ireland	12,533
Isle of Mann	142
Minorca	2,385
Gibraltar	3,339
West Indies	1,909
America	8,580
Africa	214

TABLE 1 – DISPOSITION OF THE BRITISH ARMY<sup>39</sup>

The British government initially estimated that it would take approximately 10,000 troops (one third of the proposed drawdown end-strength) to maintain law and order in the colonies. The number ultimately grew to approximately 30,000 troops by the summer of 1780. However, the constant threat from France required that a significant portion of their military force structure to left kept for “defense of the homeland.” Thus, even as the conflict in the colonies became more violent, the British did not, or better, could not dedicate a significant portion of their military in support of operations in North America. When the British decided to open a second theater of operations in 1780, they did not allocate any additional military assets to General Clinton. At the operational level, the fact that the campaign in North America was not given top priority for national resources meant that General Clinton had to fight the campaign with the forces at hand. Due to the limited assets available, Clinton's failure to ensure unity of effort within the theater doomed the campaign from the start.

Although a fraction of the British army was deployed the colonies, in May 1780 the British had a clear numerical superiority over the Rebel forces in the south, which consisted of an approximately 5,500 man ad-hoc force near Charleston. In contrast, Clinton had at his disposal over 23,000 men at his main base in New York City, as well as a fleet of approximately 19 warships.<sup>40</sup> While he was executing the Southern Strategy, an additional task of Clinton's was to prevent the loss of New York City, a major hub of commerce and a visible symbol of British presence in the north. General Washington's army (which numbered no more than 4,500) remained a serious threat to his major base. Instead of maintaining a small force of 5,000 regulars in New York, which would have been more than capable of defending the city from attack, and shifting the majority of his forces and his main base of operations to Charleston, he

did just the opposite. He kept his primary base of operation at New York City, and left over 15,000 men behind for its' defense. Therefore, Clinton executed the Southern campaign, his main effort, with 8,500 men, or 36 percent of the total force available.<sup>41</sup> A recent RAND Corporation study has concluded that a successful stabilization effort requires a force to population ratio of 2 soldiers for every 100 persons (or 2 percent of the population).<sup>42</sup> The population of the Southern Colonies (Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina, and Virginia) in 1780 totaled 830,200.<sup>43</sup> The employment of 15,000 men would have been sufficient for the task, but the 8,500 men allocated would equal a ratio of 2 soldiers for every 195 colonists. This force would prove to be incapable of gaining control of, and pacifying, an area as large as the southern colonies, let alone the Carolinas.

Colony	Population
Georgia	56,100
North Carolina	56,100
South Carolina	180,000
Virginia	538,000
Total	830,200

TABLE 2 – ESTIMATED POPULATION OF THE AMERICAN COLONIES 1780<sup>44</sup>

Clinton further complicated the issue of command and control when he returned to New York and passed responsibility for execution of the campaign to Cornwallis. Clinton's distance from the theater of operations meant that it would take days for communications (or reinforcements) to travel between the two forces. Adding confusion to the situation was the tenuous command relationship that Clinton created when he gave Cornwallis permission to communicate directly with Lord Germain, the British Secretary of State, which meant that Cornwallis could protest orders that he did not agree with to Clinton's superior. This further eroded the tenuous link between the two commanders.<sup>45</sup>

Clinton's vague commander's intent that he issued to Cornwallis upon his departure further exacerbated the situation. He wanted Cornwallis to consolidate the pacified areas, and leave further expansion north to the future. However, Cornwallis interpreted "consolidating his holdings" to mean that he had authority to create a buffer zone by establishing control of North Carolina (and eventually Virginia) as soon as possible.<sup>46</sup>

## SECURITY

Never permit hostile factions to acquire a military, political, or informational advantage....This principle enhances freedom of action by reducing vulnerability to hostile acts, influence, or surprise.<sup>47</sup>

The limited number of forces available to Cornwallis significantly hampered his ability to establish an overwhelming presence in his area of operations. The initial outposts established by General Clinton in May 1780, were extremely isolated and vulnerable to piecemeal destruction. The British, adhering to their assumption that the south was a "hotbed of Loyalists", failed to recognize that they only controlled those areas they occupied, and that outside of the range of outposts the countryside was aflame with rebel insurrection. Only the presence of Cornwallis's main body at Charleston prevented the immediate destruction of the outposts by the rebels, although many skirmishes were fought around these locations. Once Cornwallis departed Charleston in his attempt to gain control of North Carolina, these outposts became targets for rebel forces, and were eventually destroyed in detail. Additionally, during his operations to the north, rebel militia units were able to significantly degrade his operational capability by striking vulnerable supply points and detachments.

More importantly to the pacification process, the limited number of British regulars meant that Cornwallis could only provide temporary protection to the colonists who declared themselves loyal to the crown. This created a situation where British troop movements created what one author has described as "shockwaves of civilian behavior in the surrounding areas."<sup>48</sup> The intimidation factor of the British regulars appearing would compel the uncommitted to declare Loyalty, and would provide a secure environment for actual Loyalists to conduct reprisals against rebel supporters. However, once the British forces departed an area, the local rebel militias would quickly enter and would counter with reprisals against those persons who were identified as Loyalists.<sup>49</sup> This inability of the British to provide the Loyalists with credible security prevented many of them from aiding in the British operations. The brutal infighting that erupted among the populous was "the very opposite of what Americanization was supposed to bring", and forced the uncommitted seek protection from the rebel militia.

## **RESTRAINT**

A single act could cause significant military and political consequences; therefore, judicious use of force is necessary. Restraint requires the careful balancing of the need for security, the conduct of operations, and the political objective. Excessive force antagonizes those parties involved, thereby damaging the legitimacy of the organization that uses it while possibly enhancing the legitimacy of the opposing party.<sup>50</sup>

The lack of restraint by British and Loyalist forces, and the reputation that they gained for brutality, combined with the limited security that the small British force could provide, significantly undermined the British legitimacy in the theater, since the local population often felt that only the rebels could provide them with protection from indiscriminate violence. As indicted



earlier, the civil war that erupted between loyalists and rebels demonstrated to the general populous that the British could not effectively establish control over the region, and therefore forced the uncommitted to choose sides to survive. The remaining uncommitted portion of the population began to realize that that the British would not, or could not, maintain a permanent presence. Therefore it was only natural that they began to gravitate to the rebel cause for protection, which effectively eliminated any possibility for the British to effect permanent pacification.<sup>51</sup>

The actions of Cornwallis's most ruthless commander, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, vividly demonstrate the British lack of restraint and its corresponding effects. Tarleton's mounted legion, which consisted of a large number of loyalists, conducted numerous swift and violent raids throughout the theater, gaining a reputation for brutality. On May 29, 1780 LtCol Tarleton's legion fought a battle against a Continental force at Waxhaws. After a violent initial encounter, the American commander attempted to surrender, raising a white flag and ordering his men to lay down their weapons. Tarleton's force ignored the white flag and continued to attack the unarmed American force, including the wounded. The massacre became known as "Tarleton's Quarters", and emerged as a rallying cry behind which both rebel and, more importantly, non-committed colonists flocked to oppose the British.<sup>52</sup> This single event, more than any other, hardened the population against the British and further undermined their legitimacy.

The Battle of King's Mountain (October 7, 1780) was a direct result of the effect that the brutal conduct had on the populous within the theater of operations. Major Ferguson, who commanded a 1,000 man strong Loyalist unit, issued a rash declaration to the western region. Designed to intimidate the population into order, the declaration stated that the populous must cease and desist all attacks on British outposts or he would march over the mountains and "lay waste their country with fire and sword."<sup>53</sup> It had just the opposite effect. Since the British had demonstrated that they would not hesitate to conduct such operations, the inhabitants of the region, known as "over the mountain men" formed a small force, tracked down Ferguson's unit at King's Mountain, and destroyed it. In one battle, a direct result of the lack of British restraint, 12 percent of Cornwallis's force had been completely eliminated.

### **IS THE UNITED STATES REPEATING THE BRITISH MISTAKES IN IRAQ?**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct a detailed comparison between the British counterinsurgency efforts in Colonial America and the current US efforts in Iraq. A brief comparison, however, reveals some striking similarities and conversely some significant

differences. The first similarity is the flawed assumption of widespread support from the Iraqi people that our military forces would receive once Saddam Hussein was defeated. For example, Vice President Richard Cheney stated in an interview that "...from the standpoint of the Iraqi people, my belief is we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators,"<sup>54</sup> and in an August 2002 speech cited a scholar's viewpoint that the streets in Basra and Baghdad are sure to erupt in joy in the same way throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans. The principle sources of the information upon which these assumptions were based were from expatriated Iraqis, such as Ahmed Chalabi. In retrospect the sources were clearly wrong.

Another ramification of the flawed assumption of widespread support within Iraq for the Americans was a very public battle among the highest leaders of the government and military over necessary troop strengths for the operation. In February 2003, just prior to the war General Eric Shinseki publicly stated that he thought the operation would take "something in the order of several hundred thousand soldiers", and was subsequently excoriated publicly by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who stated "Any idea that it's several hundred thousand over any sustained period is simply not the case."<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, 150,000 troops were deployed to Iraq for the operation. Ironically, the initial war plan (OPLAN 1003) called for 500,000 troops to conduct operations in Iraq, which a recent RAND Corporation study concluded is the exact number of troops necessary to conduct stabilization operations in Iraq.<sup>56</sup> The failure to anticipate the correct troop requirements had led to exactly the same problems the British faced in 1780-1781, that the US cannot provide the necessary security so that the anti-insurgent forces, and more importantly, the uncommitted populous, feel safe to assist in counter insurgency efforts.

Another similarity is the tenuous legitimacy of the operation itself. The "preemptive" attack by the United States that resulted in the toppling of the Iraqi government had very little support as a legitimate operation from the viewpoint of the international community and more importantly, the Iraqi population. In fact, a majority of Iraqis believe that the United States is an occupying army versus a liberating one. As a result, an insurgency began, and it would be accurate to state that the US government and military planners did not have the necessary force strength available in country because they did not anticipate such a development. When the legitimacy of a counterinsurgency is tenuous, it must be conducted flawlessly. However, isolated, yet highly-publicized, incidents of lack of restraint by US forces such as the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal and the shooting of a prisoner by a young US Marine has served to only alienate the US from the indigenous population, thereby providing a greater degree of security to the insurgents, who can move through the population with diminished fear of being turned in

by supporters of the US. The outrage that the Iraqis demonstrated over the Abu Ghraib incident has surely facilitated support to insurgent efforts and recruitment.

As a direct result of the lack of legitimacy (as viewed by the Iraqis) and some isolated incidents of a lack of restraint, the United States appears to be losing the hearts and minds of the populous, and as a result there is a "conversion process" occurring by which more and more Iraqis supporting efforts against the United States. A recent poll conducted by Gallup presents a bleak picture, 71% of the Iraqis survey view the US as occupiers rather than liberators. More significantly, if the pro-US Kurds are taken out of the polling data, "more than half of the Iraqis say killing U.S. troops can be justified in at least some cases."<sup>57</sup> Additionally, in Baghdad, the conversion process towards support of the insurgent is more evident: in 2003 64% of the city thought attacks on US forces were either somewhat or completely unjustified, in 2004 the number had dropped to 33% percent.<sup>58</sup>

However, there are positive signs. The US has clearly articulated to the world that it is has the perseverance to see the stabilization of Iraq and the creation of a democratically elected government, and it is willing to utilize all the elements of national power to make it happen. Additionally the objective of establishing a democratically elected government and turning over the conflict to the Iraqis will undermine the sole unifying insurgent theme of the ouster the US occupiers. The US and its coalition allies are pursuing a very patient and methodical approach to "Iraqi-izing" the conflict in the training, equipping and fielding of Iraqi police and military. Unlike the Revolutionary War conflict between loyalist and rebel forces, current polls indicate that the Iraqi population does not support insurgent attacks on Iraqi forces.<sup>59</sup> Thus the insurgents have not been able to create a unifying theme that resonates with the average Iraqi other than the ouster of US "occupying forces. There the upcoming Iraqi elections will be a significant blow to the insurgency, by putting in power a democratically elected Iraqi government and beginning the transition from a US-led counterinsurgency to an Iraqi led one. Thomas Friedman described the process as creating a civil war, writing:

That is a civil war in which the murderous insurgents appear to be on the side of ending the U.S. "occupation of Iraq" and the U.S. and its allies appear to be about sustaining that occupation. The civil war we want is a democratically elected Iraqi government against the Baathist and Islamist militants. It needs to be clear that these so-called insurgents are not fighting to liberate Iraq from America, but rather to reassert the tyranny of a Sunni-Baathist minority over the majority there. The insurgents are clearly desperate that they not be cast as fighting a democratically elected Iraqi government - which is why they are desperately trying to scuttle the elections.<sup>60</sup>

It will be a lengthy process to complete the establishment and functionality of the Iraqi government, and turnover of the fighting to Iraqi forces. Until that time, the insurgency will continue to exist.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the United States continues to conduct counterinsurgency operations within Iraq, it is critical to review failed campaigns such as this one in order to avoid repeating mistakes that led to failure. The principles contained in current MOOTW doctrine provide a unique and contemporary way of analyzing the British failure to pacify the colonies in the Revolutionary War. By 1780, four years of war had severely eroded the legitimacy of the British operations to restore rule over the colonies. The British never realized the extent to which the Colonists viewed themselves as independent members of the Empire, and therefore never took steps to work with the colonists to raise taxes to pay off the enormous debt from the Seven Years War. On the contrary, they kept in place the tax acts that were the principle source of discontent among the colonists, and actually fueled the insurgent cause. In regards to the flawed Southern Campaign, the British tragically never realized that their belief that there were large numbers of Loyalists in the South waiting to be liberated was an illusion. Since the British did not enjoy a broad base of support in the South, it became critically important that they design and conduct a flawless campaign in the south designed to win the "hearts and minds" of the colonists. Although the operational concept of "Americanization" was clear, the British failed to translate this into effective peace keeping/peace enforcement tactics. The tenuous legitimacy of the campaign was shattered by the brutal conduct of the British and Loyalist forces throughout the theater. A primary reason for the failure of the campaign was the unrestrained acts of violence that inflamed the general populous and drove the uncommitted faction squarely into the camp of the rebels.

Additionally, Clinton's failure to properly allocate the appropriate number of available forces to the effort exacerbated the situation and prevented Cornwallis from establishing an overwhelming presence. Cornwallis's small force was incapable of providing a secure environment within which the pacification process could occur. As rebel support grew, Cornwallis's dispersed and isolated forces became increasingly vulnerable, and eventually led to their piecemeal defeat and Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown. Had the British applied current MOOTW doctrine and principles in the design and execution of the campaign, they may have enjoyed much greater success in the operation.

This case study is especially germane in light of the current insurgency the United States is fighting in Iraq. The United States, in the initial stages of the conflict, made several of the same errors that the British made over 200 years ago. The tenuous legitimacy of the operation, the failure to allocate the proper troop strength for pacification operations, and incidents such as Abu Ghraib which demonstrated a lack of restraint have contributed to the growth of support to the insurgency. However, the United States' efforts in creating a democratically elected Iraqi government, the methodical training of Iraqi security forces, and the clear signals of resolve in creating a stable and democratic Iraq have removed the major rallying theme of the insurgents and begun to stabilize the situation. The British and US strategies, although separated by 200 years, clearly show that the principals of MOOTW as contained in JP 3-07 are timeless, and should be the underpinnings of any successful counterinsurgency operation.

WORD COUNT= 7,537

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Don Cook, *The Long Fuse - How England Lost the American Colonies 1760-1785* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), pg 17.

<sup>2</sup> Craig L. Symonds and William J. Clipson, *A Battlefield Atlas of the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co of America, 1986) pg 108.

<sup>3</sup> Symonds, pgs 83-87.

<sup>4</sup> John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1990) pg 211.

<sup>5</sup> Symonds, pgs 88-108.

<sup>6</sup> Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (FM-I 3-07.22) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 1 October 2004), 1-1.

<sup>7</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare, translated and with an introduction by Samuel B. Griffith*. (Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co. Inc 1992), pg 69.

<sup>8</sup> Mao, pg 70.

<sup>9</sup> Mao, pg 72.

<sup>10</sup> Mao, pg 113.

<sup>11</sup> John A. Nagle, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), pg 27.

<sup>12</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War* (Joint Pub 3-07). (Washington, D.C.: Joint Warfighting Center, 16 June 1995). I-1.

<sup>13</sup> JP 3-07, pg I-1.

<sup>14</sup> JP 3-07 pg I-1.

<sup>15</sup> JP 3-07, pg 22.

<sup>16</sup> The attempts to raise revenue to pay for the debt were the Stamp Act: Enacted 1765, Repealed 1766; the Declaratory Act, Enacted 1766, which reasserted the right of Parliament to tax the colonies, the Townsend Act, Enacted 1768, Partial Repeal 1770 with the Tea Tax remaining and was a primary cause of the Boston Tea Party in December 1773, and finally the Coercive Acts, Enacted 1774

<sup>17</sup> Cook, pg 75.

<sup>18</sup> Cook, pg 75.

<sup>19</sup> Cook, pgs 324-325.

<sup>20</sup> Cook, pgs 324-325.

<sup>21</sup> Shy, pg 203.

<sup>22</sup> Shy, pg 231.

<sup>23</sup> Shy, pg 232.

<sup>24</sup> JP 3-07, pg 25.

<sup>25</sup> Shy, pg 198.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1783*. (New York; Oxford University Press, 1982) pg 26.

<sup>27</sup> Middlekauff, pg 23.

<sup>28</sup> Cook, pgs 324-325.

<sup>29</sup> Shy, pg 242.

<sup>30</sup> Shy, pg 242-243.

<sup>31</sup> JP 3-07, pgs 24-25

<sup>32</sup> Cook, pg 326.

<sup>33</sup> Shy, pg 195. On June 12, 1781, a vote in Parliament to end the war was defeated 127-99. Cook, pg 342.

<sup>34</sup> Shy, pg 195.

<sup>35</sup> JP 3-07, pg 23.

<sup>36</sup> Cook, pg 57. The national debt after the Seven Years War was 140 million pounds, which amounted to a per capita debt of 18 pounds, compared to a Colonial American per capita debt of 18 shillings.

<sup>37</sup> Cook, pg 35.

<sup>38</sup> Edward E. Curtis. "*The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution*." Internet <http://www.americanrevolution.org/britisharmy1.html>. Accessed 14 Jan 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Curtis, Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Symonds, pg 83.

<sup>41</sup> Symonds, pg 83.

<sup>42</sup> James T. Quinvilan, "*Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations*." available from <http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2003/burden.html>; Interent; accessed 7 Feb 2004.

<sup>43</sup> "Estimated Population of American Colonies, 1630-1780." available from <http://merrill.olm.net/mdocs/pop/colonies/colonies.htm>; Internet; accessed 7 Feb 2004. Source: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Dept. of Commerce from 1998 World Almanac and Book of Facts, pg. 378 The current ratio in Iraq is 2 soldiers for every 341 persons. Even the forces initially suggested by General Shinseki of 250,000 soldiers would be woefully insufficient.

<sup>44</sup> "Estimated Population of American Colonies, 1630-1780." available from <http://merrill.olm.net/mdocs/pop/colonies/colonies.htm>; Internet; accessed 7 Feb 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Cook, pg 324.

<sup>46</sup> Wood, pg 175.

<sup>47</sup> JP 3-07, pg 23.

<sup>48</sup> Shy, pg 211.

<sup>49</sup> John Shy accurately states that "every major British troop movement...created shockwaves of civilian behavior in the surrounding area. Shy, pgs 203-204, 234.

<sup>50</sup> JP 3-07, pg 24.

<sup>51</sup> Shy, pg 234.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, pg 85.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, pg 190.

<sup>54</sup> Dana Milbank "Upbeat Tone Ended with War." *Washington Post*, 29 Mar 2003; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dgn/a44801-2003mar28?language=printer>; Internet; accessed 16 Jan 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Jamie McIntyre, "Ex-Army Chief: US misread Iraq Stay." *CNN Washington Bureau*, 4 June 2003; available from <http://cnn.com/2003/us/06/03/sprj.irg.white.iraq.troops>; Internet; accessed 16 Jan 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Tommy Franks with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier*, (Harper Collins Publishers: New York, 2004) pg 329.

<sup>57</sup> Cesar G. Soriano and Steven Komarow, "Poll: Iraqis out of Patience." *USA Today*, 28 April 2004; available from [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2004-04-28-poll-cover\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2004-04-28-poll-cover_x.htm); Internet; accessed 16 Jan 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Cesar G. Soriano and Steven Komarow, "Poll: Iraqis out of Patience." *USA Today*, 28 April 2004; available from [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2004-04-28-poll-cover\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2004-04-28-poll-cover_x.htm); Internet; accessed 16 Jan 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Burkholder, "Gallup Poll of Iraq: Liberated, Occupied, or in Limbo." *The Gallup Organization*; available from [http://www.thepop.org/pdfs/gptb\\_1.pdf](http://www.thepop.org/pdfs/gptb_1.pdf); Internet; accessed 16 Jan 2005.



<sup>60</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "The Country We've Got." *New York Times*, 6 Jan 2005; available from [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/06/opinion/06friedman.html?ex=1105851600&en=7d3347bb3cf92afb&ei=5070&incamp=article\\_popular\\_4](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/06/opinion/06friedman.html?ex=1105851600&en=7d3347bb3cf92afb&ei=5070&incamp=article_popular_4); Internet; accessed 14 Jan 2005.

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